



Date: October 16, 2020  
To: House Committee on Public Health  
From: Quest Diagnostics  
Regarding: Interim Charge 1

Dear Chair Thompson, Vice Chair Wray, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Quest Diagnostics, we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on the 2021 Legislative Session Interim Charges under consideration by the Public Health Committee. Quest Diagnostics is the world's leading provider of diagnostic information services and serves one in three adult Americans and half the physicians and hospitals in the United States annually. ***We are particularly proud of our presence in Texas, which is the home to our Southwest Region headquarters, and includes approximately 3,650 employees, seven labs, and over 170 patient service centers. With our robust infrastructure in Texas, we service over 38,000 physicians and over 220 hospitals, and handle 48,000 patient specimens daily.*** Texas is also home to our MedFusion lab, which serves as Quest's Oncology Center of Excellence. Additionally, earlier this year, Quest was proud to announce a multi-pronged, long-term collaboration with Memorial Hermann Health System to broaden access to innovative, high-value laboratory services for providers and patients in Greater Houston. Through this arrangement, Quest acquired substantially all the operations of Memorial Hermann Diagnostic Laboratories, the outreach laboratory division of Memorial Hermann.

Quest's commitment to Texas has only strengthened in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, we have conducted over 1 million viral COVID-19 tests and over 153,000 serology tests to detect COVID-19 antibodies. ***We are proud to conduct this testing in multiple Texas labs.***

We applaud this Committee's focus on such important public health issues in the upcoming legislative session. Quest Diagnostics shares your commitment to addressing these matters with our robust testing menu, medical expertise, and data-sharing capabilities. For instance, ***Quest has been a leader in drug monitoring for years, helping physicians better assess, monitor, and treat their patients and helping employers identify potential drug misuse in the workplace.*** For over 30 years, Quest's annual *Drug Testing Index Report* has been a benchmark for national trends in positive drug tests in the workforce and is relied upon by government, healthcare providers, and policymakers. Quest also annually releases our *Prescription Monitoring Report* which measures drug misuse by going beyond the drugs that are prescribed to identify what is actually in a person's system. ***Our latest data shows that in 2019, 52% of patient test results from Texas were inconsistent with prescribed medications compared to the national average of 50%. For that reason, Quest Diagnostics strongly recommends that guidelines are established to call for drug testing of chronic pain patients receiving opioid therapy both before the opioid treatment begins and periodically throughout the treatment.*** Similar guidelines have been recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and are in place in several states including Virginia, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.

In addition, pregnancy provides an important opportunity to identify and treat women with substance use disorders. Substance use disorders affect women across all racial and ethnic groups and all socioeconomic groups, and affect women in rural, urban, and suburban populations. Therefore, it is essential that screening

be universal. ***Screening for substance use should be a part of comprehensive obstetric care and should be done at the first prenatal visit in partnership with the pregnant woman.*** Early universal screening, brief intervention (such as engaging a patient in a short conversation, providing feedback and advice), and referral for treatment of pregnant women with opioid use and opioid use disorder improve maternal and infant outcomes. In general, a coordinated multidisciplinary approach without criminal sanctions has the best chance of helping infants and families.<sup>1</sup>

The need for drug screening has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Quest Diagnostics conducted a recent study analyzing changes in clinical drug testing patterns and results, comparing data obtained before and during the pandemic. ***Some of our concerning findings include: a 35% increase in positivity for nonprescribed fentanyl and 44% for heroin; an increase in combinations of nonprescribed fentanyl in patients positive for other drugs; and a rapid decline in clinical drug monitoring during pandemic.*** In fact, in the second quarter of 2020, the use of heroin increased by 50.8% compared to first quarter. These observations come on top of a dramatic increases in drug overdoses nationwide, including a 42% year-over-year increase in May 2020. Despite these startling statistics, guidance issued early on in the pandemic by multiple organizations<sup>2</sup> that has limited requirements for drug testing remains in place and is limiting the use of drug monitoring, which is one of the only objective tools that can help ensure compliance and identify harmful drug interaction, misuse, abuse, and diversion.

***Quest Diagnostics is also a leader in oncology testing, and as mentioned above our Oncology Center of Excellence is located right here in Texas.*** Like the substance use epidemic and drug testing, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on cancer screening and diagnoses. In fact, Quest Diagnostics recently published an article in *JAMA Network Open*, entitled “Changes in US Patients Newly Identified With Cancers Before and During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic,” which revealed that there has been a 49% drop in detection of colorectal cancer during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> This includes a 52% decrease in breast cancer diagnoses and a 49% decrease in colorectal cancer diagnoses. As stated in the study, “While residents have taken to social distancing, cancer does not pause. The delay in diagnosis will likely lead to presentation at more advanced stages and poorer clinical outcomes.” This is the stark reality that legislative leaders will need to consider.

Finally, although it is critical that drug testing and cancer screens continue to be performed safely amid the pandemic, Quest Diagnostics recognizes that there is an increasing role for telehealth. Even in a pre- and post-pandemic world, telehealth stems risk issues for populations with underlying conditions, provides options for those that are home bound, and reduces physical exposures for at-risk individuals. Additionally, telehealth provides a viable option for rural populations that have limited access to care. ***Through our Quest HealthConnect services we can perform a variety of telehealth services including medication review and reconciliation, review of health conditions, lab result review, and prescreening questions and triage.*** In this critical time of COVID-19, telehealth can also assist with observed collections for PCR/molecular testing. Importantly, telehealth is HIPAA-compliant and CMS-approved.

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<sup>1</sup> The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

<https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2017/08/opioid-use-and-opioid-use-disorder-in-pregnancy>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Drug Enforcement Agency, American Medical Association, and the American Society of Addiction Medicine

<sup>3</sup> *JAMA Netw Open*. 2020;3(8):e2017267. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.17267

(<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2768946>)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on these important public health issues. We hope to have an opportunity to provide further insights and information as your work continues. To that end, we would be happy to bring any of our medical or operational experts forward to answer questions, share and analyze data, and share their professional opinions on these matters. Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Respectfully,

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